THE LEARNING ORGANIZATION PORTFOLIO

The Knowledge and Knowing of Spiritual Learning

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Abstract
Purpose—This article introduces the concept of Spiritual Learning by exploring the value of human characteristics spiritual in nature with respect to their relationship to learning.
Design/methodology/approach—In developing this theme, the authors engage a systematic approach: defining terms; identifying representative human characteristics that are spiritual in nature; surfacing assumptions; and identifying emerging themes among the representative spiritual characteristics with respect to learning.
Findings—There appears to be a positive correlation between the representative spiritual characteristics and human learning. For better or worse, the material and non material universe are married in the conscious and unconscious learning of the human mind.
Originality/value—This work provides a new frame of reference for understanding the relationship between spirituality and learning.
Keywords Spiritual Learning, spirituality, learning, unconscious, knowledge, knowing, spiritual characteristics
Paper type Researched, conceptual and speculative

Introduction

The question that we ask is: Do human characteristics that are spiritual in nature contribute to the learning process? To explore the answer to this question, we will take the following approach: (1) carefully define our terms and the intent of those terms in the context of this article; (2) utilize a variety of disciplines as resources to investigate the nature of spirituality in terms of human characteristics; (3) surface the assumptions underlying our engagement with this question; (4) provide a baseline discussion of ways of learning; and (5) map the themes emerging from identified spiritual characteristics to the learning process.

   Further, it is forwarded that since this article (and these co-authors) could not fully accomplish (1) through (5) above in the space available covering the entire scope of diverse points of view regarding spirituality and learning (assuming it *could* be accomplished), representative thought will be used. For example, consider number (2) above. Even within a single discipline, the concept of spirituality could not be agreed upon, yet there is what we might call a direction to that thought. The authors will use characteristics representative of this direction, characteristics that lie somewhere at the mid point of the spectrum of thought within each field.

   While relationships to specific disciplines are not necessarily called out, this cross-discipline paper emerges out of research in learning, spirituality, psychology and knowledge management.

Also note that the intent of this article is to focus on *spirituality as it contributes to learning, not the learning of spirituality*, although there may inevitably be some overlap.

Definitions

Spiritual is taken to mean pertaining to the soul, or "standing in relationship to another based on matters of the soul" (Oxford, 2002, p. 2963). Soul represents the animating principle of human life in terms of thought and action, specifically focused on its moral aspects, the emotional part of human nature, and higher development of the mental faculties. From the philosophical aspect, it is the vital, sensitive or rational principle in human beings (Oxford, 2002, p., 2928). Csikszentmihalyi says that "an enduring vision in both work and life derives its power from soul—the energy a person or organization devotes to purposes beyond itself." (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003, p. 19) As a point of reference, in a 1990-1993 World Values Survey, 93 percent of U.S. responders, 85 percent of Canadian responders, 81 percent of Swiss responders and 75 percent of West German responders expressed belief in a soul. Only 6 nations of the 38 nations surveyed had less than 50 percent of responders express a belief in the soul (Inglehart, et al., 1998, p. 168).

It is also noted that an alternative definition of spiritual is of or pertaining to the intellect (intellectual, the capacity for knowledge and understanding, the ability to think abstractly or profoundly) (American Heritage, 2000, p. 910) and of the mind (in terms of highly refined, sensitive and not concerned with material things) (Oxford, 2002, p. 2963). The term spiritualism is taken as a spiritual nature or quality, so that to spiritualize is to give a spiritual character to, or to elevate (Oxford, 2002, p. 2963). In this paper, then, **spirituality is the elevation of the mind as related to intellect and matters of the soul reflected in thought and action**.

Knowledge is considered the capacity (potential or actual) to take effective action in varied and uncertain situations (Bennet & Bennet, 2004). Briefly, knowledge encompasses understanding, meaning, and being able to anticipate the future consequences of an action with some level of confidence. In considering the concept of spiritual knowledge, it would be useful to more fully understand the source or spirit of life. Unfortunately, while progress is being made toward this understanding, to the authors' knowledge we are not there yet (Capra, et al, 2007; Bortoft, 1996).

Knowing is a cognizance, a conscious state of being aware or informed [having knowledge] (Oxford, 2002, p. 1510) **beyond that which is perceived through the five senses**, although it does not exclude incoming signals from the five senses. Knowing is created at the unconscious level, and then perceived as it emerges through our intuition, feeling or awareness. In other words, through associative patterning the mind creates feelings and a linear set of words or images based on what has been known such that there is conscious recognition and understanding (Bennet & Bennet, 2006). Understanding, in Bortoft's view, is: "Seeing something in the context in which it belongs … the experience of seeing it more fully, or itself. Instead of seeing it as instance of something else, it becomes more fully itself through being seen in its context." (Bortoft, 1996, p. 291) Knowing could be thought of as deep knowledge, knowledge created within our minds (or hearts or guts) over time through experience, contemplation, and unconscious processing such that it becomes a natural part of our being—not something learned and stored in the mind. An old adage is that one must "live" with complex subjects so that knowledge can soak into the mind until it becomes a part of who we are, not just something we know. Wisdom would be considered a subset of knowing.

Learning is an increase in the capacity for effective action. This definition emphasizes the importance of taking actions and achieving results vice intellectual knowledge without communication or application. Further, we emphasize the continuous nature of learning, recognizing that no thing is ever in the state of learnedness (possessing profound or systematic knowledge) in a changing, uncertain, complex world. Therefore Spiritual Learning would be defined as **the process of elevating the mind as related to intellect and matters of the soul to increase the capacity for effective thought and action**.

Models and Assumptions

To provide context to this exploration—and focus the field of shared understanding—the thoughts presented in this paper are shored up by a number of assumptions. First, it is assumed that consistent with human learning, the focus of this exploration, learning occurs by and within complex adaptive systems.

Second, it is assumed that Spiritual Learning as a way of learning is involved with the sevenfold spectrum of knowledge: information, sense-making, understanding, meaning, anticipating the future, intelligence and wisdom. Further, that the domain of Spiritual Learning (1) is neither dependent upon nor independent of the learner, but interconnected with the learner; (2) deals with the non material and through the non material affects the material; and (3) is primarily concerned with long-term learning (type 4 learning explicated below). By non material we mean patterns, either patterns represented by configurations of material entities such as neurons in the brain, intestines or heart, or perhaps patterns represented by non material entities such as photons.

Third, it is assumed that the human mind has some degree of access (through the five senses and beyond the five senses, whether originating consciously or unconsciously) to both that which is material (in terms of the physical world) and that which is non material. Oversimplified, this access is represented in Figure 1. Individuals can influence the material and the non material aspects of reality. The solid lines represent our interactions with the material world and the dotted lines are those interactions continuously underway in the non material domain. The slanted box represents our material frame of reference, or how the "I" perceives the reality within which we live (our personal reality). Note that the "I" recognizes and interacts with a material reality beyond the personal reality, whether consciously or through the auspices of the unconscious, i.e., the division in interactions is not that of the conscious and unconscious, but rather that of the material and non material. Further, there is continuous feedback, providing learning or learning opportunities, that occurs in interactions with the material and non material, both consciously and unconsciously.

Enter the Human Learning Process

In our development of a model of organization based on the intelligent complex adaptive system analogy (Bennet & Bennet, 2004), we forwarded that there are three types of learning. The first, developing skills (type 1 learning), requires learning and practicing new ways of doing something. The second (type 2 learning), developing knowledge in a field, requires studying and practicing better ways of taking actions, developing new processes, tools and methods, and applying new management ideas, e.g., total quality management, business process reengineering, knowledge management, or even spirituality itself. This is *single loop learning* (Argyris &

Schön, 1978)—learning that occurs when ideas and beliefs are reinforced, or problems are solved by changing actions or strategies for achieving a desired result, while the underlying theories or assumptions about those ideas, beliefs, or actions are not changed.

The third way to learn (type 3 learning) is to change the basic theory and belief about how a system works. This might mean developing new thoughts and ideas that change your beliefs or even your value set; or, in an organization when problems arise and never seem to be solved, changing the underlying theory of how the system works; or, making changes in the system to co-evolve with a changing environment. When any of these occur, an entirely new understanding of the system's structure and what makes it behave the way it does comes into being, and a new frame of reference is developed. This is *double-loop learning*—learning that occurs when new thought evolves or problems are solved by changing the fundamental values and assumptions of the belief set as well as the strategy and actions driven by that belief set. Double-loop learning is difficult because it requires individuals, groups and organizations to change the understanding of their *theory of historical success*, what the individual, group or organization must do and how it goes about doing it to achieve its goals. Double-loop learning is learning for the future in that it changes the individual's (or organization's) frame of reference, moving beyond context sensitivity and situation dependence (Bennet & Bennet, 2007) to provide new ways of looking at similar situations.

While certainly behavior reflecting spiritual thought may be involved in both type 1 and type 2 learning, the domain of Spiritual Learning would reside largely in type 3 learning, that is, double-loop learning, in that spiritual growth will undoubtedly affect or expand frames of reference more traditionally associated with bureaucratically-oriented business and government environments. Spiritual Learning would also *move beyond* double-loop learning to what might be described as type 4 learning, that which has been called intuition, or the "ah ha!" experience, or what could be attributed in spiritual literature to unconscious streaming or channeling. Whatever the source, type 4 learning emerges unconsciously as a form of knowing, with insights often taking the form of transformative knowledge. For example, in times of warfare there are numerous recorded instances where military personnel under fire have known what movements to make without detailed knowledge of the terrain or enemy troop movement.

If "thinking and emotions [are] inseparable from each other and from the social context in which the activity takes place" (Wlodkowski, 1998, p. 68), another way of exploring the concept of Spiritual Learning is in terms of human capital, social capital and spiritual capital, all of which may contribute to individual—and subsequently organizational—learning (A. Bennet, 2006). Human capital is an individual's knowledge, competency and future potential, including a unique set of characteristics and values from the past such as expertise, education and experience. Social capital is built from the interactions across human relationship networks (Bennet & Bennet, 2004). It is also considered by some economists and sociologists as "the social benefit gained by a society that has low crime, low divorce and illegitimacy rates, low litigation figures, higher literacy, and a high degree of trust" (Zohar & Marshall, 2003, p. 26). Beyond material worth, then, social capital involves a "raised quality of life in a society" (Zohar & Marshall, 2003, p. 26), a wider sense of connectedness and social responsibility. Further, learning is directly connected to an individual's everyday life *and* the community in which an individual lives, the social context. "To view the learning experience in isolation from everyday experience is to miss some valuable aspects of the learning process. The spiritual dimension is best seen through an understanding of the whole person in a social context." (Wickett, 2000, p. 45)

While spiritual capital could be considered in terms of the *amount* of spiritual knowledge and expertise available to an individual (Zohar & Marshall, 2003, p. 27), in our model spiritual capital is both an amount (in terms of subject/object feelings and feeling activities) and an internal state-of-being (in terms of a condition, nature or essence), or a quality. Considering capital in terms of stock, spiritual capital would represent an individual's (or organization's, or country's, or world's) investment in the process of spiritual growth. In its entangled learning role with human and social capital, spiritual capital expands the individual's threshold of awareness, the functioning space within which knowledge and events make sense (Bennet & Bennet, 2006).

Learning itself can be a state of being, carried over time, that contains, accepts and nurtures a process of becoming that continues throughout a lifetime. In this regard it is similar to spiritual capital: learning capital is the capacity to learn, both the potential and actual ability to implement learning processes and create knowledge. When the process is Spiritual Learning, the outcome is likely to be, or be associated with, human development, growth and becoming. While the word "becoming" begs the question: "Becoming what?" we defer here to our previous discussion of being as a condition, state or essence—with a continuous existence and influenced by a higher order of the possibilities open to the expanded aspects of being human. Our answer is, becoming more of what it is to be a higher-order human. An analogy in the organizational frame would be continuous learning. Human capital, social capital and spiritual capital, then, are entangled forms of learning capital.

Representative Human Characteristics that are Spiritual in Nature

While there is a bevy of information written on what it is to be spiritual, we have chosen to use two primary sources: (1) text reference materials: several dictionaries (American Heritage, 2000; Oxford, 2002); multiple-author reference books focused on the great ideas, modern thought and human thought (Adler, 1992; Rohmann, 1999); and (2) a bevy of randomly-collected books in the spiritual section of our 20,000 volume research library (Almass, 2004; Ardagh, 2005; Brussat & Brussat, 2000; Dyer, 2001; Elbert, 2000; Hendricks, 2000; Lerner, 2000; Rasha, 2003). Beyond identifying repetitions, we add to the mix our own intuition and speculation on which of the multiple repetitive concepts introduced in the various reference texts represent the highest order of human evolution. These characteristics are not forwarded as an exclusive set, but rather as indicators of the nature of the spiritual human.

As characteristics began to emerge through our research, we explored those characteristics considered emotional in nature in a subject/object relationship, denoting feelings or feeling activity directed toward a specific event, person or thing. The "subject" is "I" (the individual human as learner) who is in relationship with some object as denoted by the blanks in Table 1. In alphabetical order representative characteristics include the following: *aliveness, caring, compassion, eagerness, empathy, expectancy, harmony, joy, love, respect, sensitivity, tolerance* and *willingness*. As shown in Table 1, these characteristics can generally be considered context-dependent and time-sensitive. This categorizing is discussed further below. Context is the set of circumstances surrounding the subject "I" (Bennet & Bennet, 2007) and time-sensitive means occurrence of a feeling or feeling activity at a particular time or for a bounded period of time.

aliveness	"I feel alive" in response to surroundings, or a stimulating event or series of events, or a person
caring	"I care about _____"
compassion	"I have compassion towards _____"
eagerness	"I am eager to _____"
empathy	"I have empathy towards _____"
expectancy	"I expect _____ to happen/to come"
harmony	"I am in harmony with _____"
joy	"I feel joy about/because _____"
love	"I love _____"
respect	"I respect _____"
sensitivity	"I am sensitive about/to _____"
tolerance	"I am tolerant of _____"
willingness	"I am willing to _____"

Table 1: *Subject("I") in relationship with Object (Event, Person or Thing)*

Each of the characteristics in this subject/object group can become a condition as the object moves beyond an event, person or thing to holistic concepts embracing humanity and the world, as well as domains of the spirit. An example would be moving beyond love of a person or thing to living life fully in the condition of love (although love still denotes some form of generative activity—emotional involvement—even when addressed toward the world in general). This condition of love would be the higher order of love that is framed in Latin as *agapé*. A second example would be putting "conscious energy into developing a compassionate attitude toward all of being, all animals, and all human beings, including yourself" (Lerner, 2000, p. 291), what we would call the higher order of compassion.

The second group of characteristics that are spiritual in nature represent a **state-of-being**. For this usage, being is considered a condition, nature, or essence (Oxford, 2002, p. 212) of existence, specifically, immaterial aspects of human existence. These characteristics are descriptive in nature. In alphabetical order, characteristics representative of this group are: *abundance, authenticity, awareness, connectedness, consistency, grace, morality, openness, presence, readiness, unfoldment* and *wonder*. When considered as a condition or nature of an individual, these characteristics are continuous or a "mark of character," that is, not a temporal phenomena but a long-term or possibly life characteristic.

There is often pre-history to a state-of-being. This pre-history might include events, people and things that move an individual towards a state-of-being, or bring to the surface an essence or nature of the person. For example, Buddhist monks can undergo years of training, reflection and contemplation prior to achieving states of expanded awareness. While events and interactions occurring during the preparation period may be reflected in subject/object terms, over time they blend into a larger state-of-being. There is a fuzzy continuum between the subject/object characteristics and the state-of-being characteristics, with those characteristics described above as having a subject/object relationship having the potential—when repeated over and over again in different situations—to serve as conditioning for a way of being. We might even go so far as to say this progression represents spiritual growth. For example, Catherine Ingram presents aliveness, listed above in the subject/object category, as a state-of-being,

> [A]nyone who has been rendered speechless in the presence of beauty, genius, love, birth, or death, anyone who simply observes the most mundane of this fantastic existence

and marvels at the stunning intelligence that informs it, lives in a sense of aliveness that no religion or belief can provide. (Ingram, 2003, p. 192)

Does this mean that those characteristics presented in the state-of-being group could be reduced in scope to a subject-object relationship? While certainly they *could* be considered in terms of a subject/object relationship, a state-of-being infers a higher order such that there is no subject or object. For example, while authenticity could also be considered a subject/object characteristic that is situation-dependent and time-sensitive (that man is an authentic Indian), in the higher-order context of a spiritual life it is considered an authenticity of self, a condition or nature, finding the whole in the parts. As Bartoft writes,

> The meaning of a sentence has the unity of a whole. We reach the meaning of the sentence through the meaning of the words, yet the meaning of the words in that sentence is determined by the meaning of the sentence as a whole. (Bortoft, 1996, p. 8)

Further, while being authentic may mean that what you see is what you get, the expanded state of authenticity strives "for an authenticity that is kind, caring, and socially responsible." (Chickering, et al, 2006, p. 8)

Within our organizations—heavily embedded in the historical precedence of an economy of lack and competition—an economy of *abundance* is difficult to imagine. Knowledge and learning provide good examples for understanding abundance. The only limits to learning are those imposed by the individual (and the organization); and the more you learn, the more you realize there is to learn. Similarly, since knowledge is a product of learning, and knowledge begets knowledge, there is *potentially no end in sight*. Lerner says the lived experience of spirituality includes "a deep trust that there is enough for all and that every human being deserves to share equally in the planet's abundance and is equally responsible for shaping our future" (Lerner, 2000, p. 5). The recently-released book/movie titled *Secret* is built on a theme of abundance using what is termed the law of attraction, "See yourself living in *abundance* and you will attract it. It works every time, with every person." (Byrne, 2006, p. 12)

Awareness is being conscious, having knowledge and being cognizant of current conditions and developments (Oxford, 2002, p. 160). "Spirituality means waking up" (De Mello, 1990, p. 5), being aware within the reality framework within which we live as well as within the larger framework of connectedness. This is consistent with the definition of knowing introduced above. Awareness does not necessarily mean that knowledge is at the forefront in every single moment, although when we speak we are generally aware of the meaning of what we are saying after we have said it. Recall that knowledge is the capacity (potential and actual) to take effective action. Awareness (in close relationship with knowing) carries with it an internal conviction that subtly, beneath the waters of consciousness, guides our actions. Take for example a situation where you are an invited speaker at a strategic conference in your area of expertise. As Dummett explains,

> [Y]our confidence that you understand an utterance, like your assurance that you know the identity of an individual you encounter or perceive, carries with it a conviction that you can do various relevant things—not merely that you could explain it if asked, but that you can react to it appropriately, comment on it, raise objections to it, act on it now or

later, and so on—in short, that you *know* [emphasis added] what to do with it. (Dummett, 1991, p. 99)

Connectedness refers to a connectedness of all things, a oneness not necessarily a subject-object mechanistic connection. Rather, it is closer to being immersed in an energy field (light or heat, for example) where everyone is giving off and receiving energy; where sinks, sources, resonances and interdependencies may occur between, among and throughout the entire space. The concept of connectedness is so prevalent in spirituality that English and Gillen define spirituality itself as awareness of connectedness, an "awareness of something greater than ourselves, a sense that we are connected to all human beings and to all of creation." (English & Gillen, 2000, p. 1) In a learning group, connectedness is perceived as "a sense of belonging for each individual and an awareness that each one cares for the others and is cared for … a shared understanding …." (Wlodkowski, 1998, p. 70). The connectedness or oneness as a state-of-being would then manifest in a life of service, which concept is also forwarded as spiritual in nature. In its highest order, connectedness would include an understanding and appreciation for the autopoietic aspects of an individual's framework of reality as well as expanded states of consciousness. Autopoiesis is the property of complex living systems that structurally adapt and co-evolve with their external environment while maintaining their organization.

Consistency is a life consistency, where beliefs, values, feelings, thoughts and actions are integrated into a life-long cohesive approach to living and learning. *Grace* represents a credible, virtuous aspect that is in favor. In spiritual terms it is considered a regenerating, inspiriting and strengthening influence (Oxford, 2002, p. 1132). Directly related to discussion of connectedness, Williamson says that a state of grace exists "when we have remembered at last who we are to one another. That we *are* one another." (Williamson, 2002, p. 252).

While *morality* is generally used in a subject/object manner, with some specific qualifier, our usage is larger, supporting the belief that there can be/should be/will be a universal morality. The philosopher Hobbes recognized that moral virtues were praised because of the calamities avoided if people act morally (Gert, 1998). The point made here is that morality is concerned with *how behaviors affect others*. Further, Gert states that any definition of morality includes two necessary features: that anyone about whom a moral judgment is made know what morality is, and that the individual making moral judgment use that same morality as a guide for their own conduct (Gert, 1998, p. 9). Herein lies a paradox between the understanding of morality in the material world and an interpretation that would be consistent with other characteristics of spirituality. Often-repeated guidance appearing in spiritual literature is to suspend judgment, judgment of oneself and judgment of others. Recognizing that judgment is a faculty for operating in the material world, Dyer states, "Hold no one or no thing in judgment … In the world of spirit there is no right side and wrong side. There is only a field of infinite harmony that we are calling spiritual." (Dyer, 2001, p. 133) Conversely, as Gert forwards, our historical understanding of morality implies moral judgment. Compounding this paradox is the accepted terminology used earlier (see Definitions) that describe the soul as the animating principle of human life in terms of thought and action, specifically focused on its moral aspects (Oxford, 2002, p. 2928). Before we spend too much thought in this quagmire, let us recognize that this paradox may only exist because of our inability to perceive morality without judgment, a morality that might well usher in an advanced social state of existence.

Openness is directly related to trust, which is only possible when we relinquish control of our day-to-day lives to some greater order. In an organizational setting, this might be defined as a

cumulative belief that another individual will live up to our expectations. As De Furia (1997) notes, "Interpersonal trust is present in a situation in which one individual places his or her interests under the control of another individual, with the expectation of gaining a desired outcome for which the potential negative consequences of violated trust are greater than the value of the potential desired outcome" (p. 5). This example, of course, represents a subject/object relationship. The higher-order of openness included in the state-of-being group of spiritual characteristics describes a *trusting nature*, what might be referred to as trusting the universe. Note that this does *not* insinuate naivety.

Presence builds upon this openness. It is the capacity for accessing the field of the future, a letting go and letting come, a "deep listening, of being open beyond one's preconceptions and historical ways of making sense" (Senge, et al., 2004, p. 11). In a more rhetorical sense, Jaworski sees presence as, "A profound opening of the heart, carried into action" (Senge, et al, 2004, p. 240). Presencing, then, can be considered opening to a shift of awareness, recognizing a changing environment and embracing new ways of learning, thinking and acting (D. Bennet, 2006), or what Scharmer refers to as "waking up together—waking up to who we really are by linking with and acting from our highest future Self …." (Senge, et al., p. 240).

Readiness goes beyond a state of preparedness to include an embedded capacity for quick response and a general openness and willingness toward future growth and learning. Again, note the expansion of the term willingness which is referenced above in a subject/object relationship. This usage is larger, insinuating a continuous willingness as an element of the nature of readiness. In like manner, while *unfoldment* represents a process over time as we know it, unfoldment is a continuous process throughout a life of growth and learning. The spiritual context to unfoldment includes an *allowing* in terms of space and time somewhat similar to the well-worn adage, everything in its own time. *Wonder* occurs at that intersection of one's boundary of youth, knowledge and spiritual maturity. Wonder is an element of what could be called awakened awareness. In a state of wonder, there may be no need for answers to the higher level questions; we may be content to *live with* the questions. Lerner states that, "In a spiritually oriented society, the people most highly regarded will be those whose skills are concerned with nurturing others, helping them to develop their own capacities to be loving, conscious, self-determining, wise, playful, joyous, and *filled with awe and wonder*." (Lerner, 2000, p. 269-270)

Finally, considering our tendency to interpret the materialistic world as dualistic (black/white; good/bad; negative/positive; soft/hard; male/female), we can look at spiritual characteristics in terms of those barriers that must be overcome in order to fully engage the spiritual state. In alphabetical order, representatives of these barriers are: ego, fear, judging (discussed above) and worry. While clearly all negativity can interfere with higher states of spirituality, it is also acknowledged that our wide range of feelings and experiences often serve as the process of learning, propelling us towards higher states of thought and being. A deeper discussion of this nature is beyond the scope of this paper.

While by definition ego is individualistic and self-centric, concerned with self-esteem or self-importance, in a larger sense it can be viewed as "a set of thoughts that define an individual's universe" (Dass, 1980, p. 138). Ego represents the "I" of the subject/object relationship, which must be moved beyond individual confinement to engage oneness, or being in a state of connectedness. The spiritual concept is to move beyond our ego (again, a faculty for engaging the material world), detaching from our old habits and freeing our awareness and thoughts. As Dass explains,

> We need the matrix of thoughts, feelings, and sensations we call the ego for our physical and psychological survival … [but] as long as the ego calls the shots, we can never become other than what it says …We can learn to venture beyond it, though … [then the] ego is there, as our servant." (Dass, 1980, p. 138)

In the context of Spiritual Learning, we are concerned with releasing the ego to inner development, to learning.

Facing and overcoming fear has been a close companion of man's conversations throughout recorded history. We draw quotes from a multi-discipline group of historical figures to comment on the value of overcoming fear:

> "Your greatest gift lies beyond the door named fear …." (Sufi saying); "If we have respect for all created things and treat all human beings with love and respect … we are spared the need to live in fear or tension …." (Babaji); "Nothing in life is to be feared, only understood …." (Marie Curie); "Fear is the main source of superstition, and one of the main sources of cruelty. To conquer fear is the beginning of wisdom …." (Bertrand Russell); "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself …." (Franklin D. Roosevelt); "Of all the liars in the world, sometimes the worst are your own fears …. (Rudyard Kipling); "Fear is fatal …." (Harry Houdini); [and so forth] (Zubko, 1996, pp. 164-165).

Worry can be considered a form of fear, anxiety in terms of uncertainty about the future (or perhaps a fear of failure). The spiritual response to worry is mindful living, the concept of living life moment by moment, or in the now. Part of the "overcoming" is embracing the fear and letting it go. As Lesser explains, "Everything that occurs is not only usable and workable but it is actually the path itself. We can use everything that happens to us as the means for waking up" (Lesser, 1999, p. 126), what could be called Spiritual Learning.

Finally, a discussion of representative characteristics of Spiritual Learning cannot ignore the larger context of meaning and values. Wlodkowski forwards that, "One way to understand meaning is to see it as an increase in the complexity of an experience or idea that relates to people's values or purposes. This meaning may be beyond articulation, as in the realm of the creative or spiritual." (Wlodkowski, 1998, p. 75) Similarly, Van Ness contends that spirituality is the expression of an individual's quest for meaning (Van Ness, 1996). In presenting their case for what they call spiritual intelligence, Zohar and Marshall argue that,

> Human beings are essentially spiritual creatures because we are driven by a need to ask 'fundamental' or 'ultimate' questions … We have a longing for something that takes us beyond ourselves and the present moment, for something that gives us and our actions a sense of worth." (Zohar & Marshall, 2000, p. 4)

We agree that meaning and values are that which provide context to life. It is this longing to find meaning that propels the human forward along the path of learning. In the largest sense, Lerner sees this as "a deep inner knowing that our lives have meaning through our innermost being as manifestations of the ultimate goodness of the universe" (Lerner, 2000, p. 5).

Connecting the Dots

An exploration of the relationship of those human characteristics that are spiritual in nature and human learning beg the questions: Do these spiritual characteristics contribute to learning? Is there a subset of these spiritual characteristics that contribute to deep learning or knowing? If we combine these spiritual characteristics, do any patterns emerge that will help us further understand this concept of Spiritual Learning?

We will explore the answers to these questions collectively by beginning with the last question. See Figure 2 for a graphical display of these characteristics. Recognizing that the spiritual characteristics presented in this paper are representative only, there still appear to be a number of emergent themes in relationship to learning. These themes are loosely described as: shifting frames of reference, moving toward wisdom, priming for learning, enriching relationships, and animating for learning. See Figure 2.

Shifting Frames of Reference are intertwined with learning, thinking and acting (Bennet, 2006b), and can be the result of type 3 and type 4 learning. There are two categories that shifting frames of references fall into: (1) looking from a different perspective (the external approach), and (2) taking an empathetic perspective (the internal approach), which moves the viewpoint from the objective to the subjective. The internal approach is one step beyond a hermeneutic approach (the thing in itself, the observed). It is not merely embedding yourself into the object but becoming part of the object and observing (and feeling) from within the object. Spiritual characteristics introduced above that support shifting frames of reference include: *abundance, awareness, caring, compassion, connectedness, empathy* and *openness*. As Senge, et al, state, "The key to the deeper levels of learning is that the larger living wholes of which we are an active part are not inherently static … When we become more *aware* of the dynamic whole, we also become more *aware* of what is emerging." (Senge, et al, 2004, p. 10)

We have introduced wisdom as a part of the knowledge spectrum and taken Sternberg's definition which forwards the goal of achieving the common good (Sternberg, 2003). While spiritual terminology forwards the term "greater good," for purposes of this paper the common good is taken to mean the greater good. Spiritual characteristics that support **Moving Toward Wisdom**—contributing to a common good—include: *caring, connectedness, love, morality, respect* and *service*. If you think from the perspective of wisdom—looking above and beyond the subject and object—you learn about the system in which the subject and object interact. Further, the content and context of that interaction may change from that viewpoint, facilitating a higher order of understanding both in terms of the system and what is being communicated. For example, Chickering, et al, said that grappling with a personal understanding of the concepts of wisdom, *compassion*, integrity, *values, morality* and character will determine if individuals "will use the knowledge and skills they have acquired … for the betterment of the individual, their communities, and the larger society." (Chickering, et al, 2006, p. 2) Wisdom can be directly linked to knowing. For example, the inventor of the polio vaccine, Jonas Salk, rejected common wisdom and tapped into what he called the *continually unfolding dynamism of the universe*, "an active process that … I can guide by the choices I make" (*The New York Times*, 1993, p. 1, 9). This is what we would define as type 4 learning. As a second example, Senge, et al, state that this inward-bound journey is what lies at the heart of all creativity. They quote W. Brian Arthur, a noted economist of the Santa Fe Institute, as saying: "Every profound innovation is based on an inward-bound journey, on going to a deeper place where knowing comes to the surface." (Senge, et al, 2004, p. 11)

Priming for Learning concerns attributes that facilitate the condition of learning. Priming is used in the sense of preparing, but an active preparing, a moving *toward* learning. Spiritual characteristics that support a priming for learning are: *awareness, eagerness, expectancy, openness, presence, sensitivity, unfoldment* and *willingness*. These characteristics also operate at the fringe of knowing, operating between that of which we are consciously aware and that of which we are less aware. The psychologist William James suggests that thoughts and feelings move in and out of *awareness* (James, 1890). As we move about our lives, what is on the fringe is the context, the entangled associations and feelings that give meaning to the content (Bennet & Bennet, 2007). Frager and Fadiman describe this fringe as the feeling of *almost knowing*, the feeling of being on the right track, and the intention to act before you know exactly how you are going to act (Frager & Fadiman, 1998) Similarly, *expectancy, presence* and *unfoldment* are focused on future experiences.

The spiritual characteristics in the category of **Enriching Relationships** contribute to building social capital. These are: *authenticity, consistency, morality, respect, tolerance* and *values*. Competence theory (White, 1959) assumes that it is natural for people to strive for effective interactions with their world. Further, Nouwen contends that it is through the two dimensions of spirituality that exist beyond ourselves—with others and beyond the human—that we can truly learn to grow in understanding (Nouwen, 1975). English & Gillen state that "*authentic* spirituality moves one outward to others as an expression of one's spiritual experiences." (English & Gillen, 2000, p. 1) Wlodkowski says that since adults have a strong need to apply their learning to the real world, "they are more motivated [to learn] when the circumstances under which they assess their competence are *authentic* to their actual lives" (Wlodkowski, 1998, p. 78) From a learning motivational viewpoint, Wlodkowski would add the word inclusion, which he defines as "awareness of learners that they are part of an environment in which they and their instructor are respected by and connected to one another" (Wlodkowski, 1998, p. 69).

Respect is a condition of being esteemed or honored. It carries with it a sense of worth, of value. Respect is central to a spiritually-based relationship (Orr, 2000; Vogel, 2000). It is at the core of the Native American medicine wheel, often referred to as the circle of life, as teaching and learning is passed from elder to child in a continuous process of what Orr calls the spirituality of relationships: teaching through sharing and respect (Orr, 2000). Similarly, Csikszentmihalyi says, "We have to learn [values], as we learn the language our parents speak … *Values* are memes, units of information passed down from one generation to another that shape our ways of thinking and our actions." (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003, p. 209) From these examples it appears that this group of spiritual characteristics might also be thought of as guiding and perpetuating the process of learning.

Animating for Learning speaks to the fundamental source of life—learning, energy used for survival and growth. Spiritual characteristics that fall into this area include*: aliveness, grace, harmony, joy, love, presence* and *wonder*. Csikszentmihalyi's flow state—the positive aspects of human experience (*joy*, creativity, *total involvement with life*)—enables people to "experience the remarkable potential of the body and mind fully functioning in *harmony*" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003, p. 63). Studying adult learning, Wlodkowski concludes that, "more positive emotions, such as *wonder* and *joy*, are often more likely to deepen interest and nurture involvement" (Wlodkowski, 1998, p. 76) While focusing on adult educators, Vogel "honors the experience of each person and leaves room for mystery [that] can lead to transformative teaching and learning" (English & Gillen, 2000, p. 3). Vogel's ideas include not only exploring our inner lives to discover insights that can inform our questions, but tapping into our spiritual lives in *life-giving*

ways, open to difference and accepting of others (Vogel, 2000). *Presence* might also support this animating for learning category in terms of moving toward an emerging whole.

> In talking with entrepreneurs, we found extraordinary clarity regarding what it means to act in the service of what is emerging … We came to realize that both groups are really talking about the same process—the process whereby we learn to "presence" an emerging whole, to become what George Bernard Shaw called "a force of nature". (Senge, et al, 2004, p. 10)

Responding to our first and second questions, the characteristics surfaced that represent those human characteristics spiritual in nature clearly support learning, both in terms of knowledge and knowing. Further, all those characteristics that support type 3 and type 4 learning would be strong contributors to deep learning or knowing. By definition, type 4 learning *is* knowing. Through our grouping we have surfaced themes that would appear to contribute to understanding the evolving concept of Spiritual Learning. However, this is only the beginning. Spiritual characteristics could also be related to a multitude of conditions and processes that contribute to good business; for example, the direct relationship of openness and respect to successful communications—and successful communities of practice—in organizations. We invite the reader to follow these logical relationships.

A Final Reflection

We believe there is a positive correlation between these representative spiritual characteristics and human learning. This makes sense, of course, since there are overarching connections between the concepts of spirituality and learning that are embedded by virtue of the concepts themselves. For example, Teasdale explains, "Being spiritual suggests a personal commitment to a process of inner development that engages us in our totality … the spiritual person is committed to growth as an essential ongoing life goal." (Teasdale, 1999, pp. 17-18) In other words, learning (growth) is a life goal of spirituality. Therefore, it follows that human characteristics that are spiritual in nature would contribute to learning.

Further, from the above discussion, we would agree that Spiritual Learning supports personal growth, helps us understand reality, helps others, and contributes to the greater good. There are indicators that recognition of the relationship of spirituality to these values is spreading. For example, as we entered the new millennium a World Commission on Spirituality was inaugurated whose commissioners included Nobel Prize winner Elie Wiesel and Bishop Desmond Tutu (Cousins, 1999; Shafer, 1999). In the field of adult education, English and Gillen conclude that "a more holistic approach of learning, which includes a spiritual dimension, is what is needed in the field of adult education in the years ahead." (English & Gillen, 2000, p. 5) The authors recognize this movement. But how can we engage this Spiritual Learning to solve problems, make decisions, take actions and survive in our everyday lives and organizations? Historically, at least on paper, there has been a separation of state and religion. Whether that separation is, ever has been, or could exist is highly debatable (that is another paper for a different journal). However, regardless of one's position on that debate, what we have dealt with in this paper is *not* religion, but the concept of spirituality, which by its definition—taken from two major dictionaries of the English Language—is impossible for the human mind to disengage. For better or worse, the material and non material—if they exist—are married in the conscious and unconscious learning of the human mind.

As Posner informs us, "The workplace spirituality movement is … beginning to penetrate the consciences of the world's corporations." (Posner, 1999, p. 72) While the idea of embracing spirituality in the workplace is just beginning to appear in organizational literature, as can be recognized by the discussion above, wherever the human mind exists so too does spirituality, and so too does Spiritual Learning. The implications of these finding to organizations may be profound. While more rigorous research is required, by recognizing the presence and value of Spiritual Learning in our lives and in our organizations, we can open our minds to new frames of reference. Through these new frames of reference we can build organizational environments that not only honor diversity of thought and belief, but diversity of learning, capitalizing on new ways of learning and the higher values of the human soul.

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